

X: COLUMBUS

This is my first and possibly last chance to be a columnist.

Before again taking the veil of silence, I must crowd a good bit into a few hundred words. How should one use this unique opportunity?

If it were used to write of columnists, this might be to abuse the hospitality of a distinguished member of the fraternity -- one whose writings I have always enjoyed and whose integrity, fearlessness, and honesty I have always admired.

I have to write my "columns" too; daily, weekly, and sometimes on the hour. I have to stick my neck out even more often, though less publicly, than the professionals. Maybe I have a slight advantage over the professionals in the volume of information upon which I base my prognostications. Maybe therefore I should have a better batting average.

I must have secrecy to do my work. This is provided by law and by considerations of national security. For that reason, no matter what the columnists say of the CIA I may not confirm it or deny it, whether it is correct or incorrect. I must remain silent

for the good of our Nation.

Possibly when one writes for a Governmental audience, highly restricted as to membership, it is easier to be more philosophical and a bit less pessimistic than when one must catch the eye of the general public. I know a newspaper is a business and has to show a profit. Disasters and failures rather than consistent good work catch the eye of the man in the street and that helps sell the papers. Drama makes its natural appeal to writer and reader. Consistent success is only par for the course and few in government or in the writing profession consistently achieve it.

Our chief competitor for world respect, the Soviet Union, has few of these problems. Secrecy in the Soviet Union and secrecy in our free republic are worlds apart, have very different meanings in action. There, criticism, disclosure, soul-searching are not permitted to their writers. Their problems, the racial problem for example, are dealt with in quite another fashion. They just eliminate the subject matter of the problem -- with the maximum of secrecy. Purges,

demotions, and deportations take place in silence.

Our information program, it is sometimes said, is inadequate.

But let us not forget that we tell about our failures as well as our successes and give it on a silver platter. On the other side of the curtain, they cover their weaknesses and present themselves to the world as peace-lovers working selflessly to help others and cry "excelsior" as they press to the summit.

How many people know that with a total industrial production of about 40% of our own, their gross military effort is about equal to ours? The difference they take out of the hide of their own people in scrimping on consumer goods and all that goes to raise the standard of living and to make life more worthwhile.

Criticism is easy. Constructive accomplishment, more difficult.

In the field of international affairs, this must be achieved these days against the background of forces let loose by two devastating wars -- the world-shaking Bolshevik revolution, the rise of unbridled nationalism and of the populations immature in the art of making

government by the people really work. Dictatorships, whether of the so-called Proletariat or the Fascist type, appear to many to be an easy if unsatisfactory answer.

In the last 40 years, more new countries have been created than in the 40 centuries which preceded it. Each has its problems, its demands, its animosities and its fears. This does not help to create a comfortable world. However, it is the one in which we live and about which we columnists write, and in which our government must chart its course. He who expects quick and wholly satisfactory answers is an optimist indeed. But dark pessimism because the cure does not seem to be around the corner is equally unrealistic. Some course between these extremes may well promise the best hope.

We in America are fortunate to have a free press and to have columnists of the high integrity of Tom Stokes to keep that freedom alive.